



Honorable Chair Terry Canales and Members of the House Committee on Transportation,

Texas faces a number of challenges regarding transportation and land use and their effects on public health and public safety; these issues will likely worsen if appropriate actions are not taken. According to a 2017 emissions inventory, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the transportation sector have gone up 52% since 1990. In 2019, Texas led the nation in traffic deaths. Transportation systems are vital components of communities and cities that allow the movement of people and goods in an efficient manner that also significantly impact air quality, public safety, and public health. With its increasing combination of urban, suburban, and rural communities, the need to look at the long-term health impacts of our policy and infrastructure decisions could not be more important. For example, with regard to transportation, in 2014 the Houston-area ranked near the bottom (182 out of 220) among the largest sprawling metro areas. A higher degree of sprawl, as measured by the Sprawl Index, increases vehicle miles traveled and has been associated with higher levels of obesity and lower life expectancies among other quality of life issues.

Research suggests that cities with a higher degree of sprawl also have a higher number of ozone exceedances than more compact metropolitan areas. The Houston area has the highest vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in Texas and is forecasted to add an additional 50 million VMT by 2050. Moreover, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) estimates that because of population growth, there will be 61% more vehicles on the road by 2045. Last year, the Houston region experienced thirty-three high ozone days and, according to the 2019 American Lung Association State of the Air Report, was ranked 9th for most ozone-polluted cities. Ground-level ozone can trigger asthma attacks, inflame and damage airways, and cause chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Moreover, air toxics from mobile sources, such as benzene and formaldehyde, can cause damage to the immune system, reproductive and neurological disorders, and respiratory problems.

Transportation policies that have prioritized the building of roads and highway infrastructure, coupled with poor land use planning, have contributed to many health and environmental inequities in many Texas cities. These policy decisions have fragmented many communities of color, undermined funding for alternative modes of transportation, facilitated a sprawling landscape, increasing the distance between homes and jobs, and advanced residential segregation. The Federal Executive Order 12898 instructs agencies to “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high adverse human health and environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations in the United States.” Thus, strengthening community engagement of historically excluded groups into transportation decision-making processes is not only necessary but is also a requirement.

Policymakers and transportation planners across the country are increasingly using health impact assessments (HIA) to create a more robust project planning process, ensuring that potential projects lead to positive outcomes in increased mobility, improved public health, and enhanced public safety. HIAs allow for transportation planners to include how the built environment will impact surrounding communities' health and quality of life beyond simply meeting minimum requirements. Air Alliance Houston urges the committee to consider legislation requiring HIAs be conducted on major transportation projects to more fully understand the long-term impacts of infrastructure planning.

Sincerely,

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